

Brinthaupt, T. M. Fisher, L. S. Gardner, J. G. Raffo, D. M. and Woodward, J. B. (2011). What the Best online Teachers Should Do. *MERLOT Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, 7(4) 515-524.

In this journal article the authors suggest that there is relatively little discussion on the “art” of good teaching online. They use Bain’s (2004) book *What the Best College Teachers Do* as a basis for their discussion and explore methods that may be used online to foster student engagement, stimulate intellectual development and build rapport with students. In conclusion the authors suggest that the point is not whether online teaching is easier or more difficult than face to face teaching but rather that teaching online is different and recognising and adjusting to the potential losses and limitations when a course is taught online is what they mean when talking about the attitude of the best online teachers.

The authors admit that all Bain’s examples with the exception of one were taken from teachers who teach in the traditional classroom but they contend that there is nothing in Bain’s work that suggests the activities of the best teachers cannot be transferred online. They suggest that literature has provided best practise guidelines but they argue these guidelines deal with the “science” of teaching online rather than the “art”. Through this discussion they aim to bridge some of that gap. Whilst not wishing to provide best practise guidelines the authors do produce a list of behaviours that they contend will foster student engagement, stimulate intellectual development and build rapport with students with ideas as to how they can be achieved online. They emphasise however that the issue is not the correct way or the frequency that these behaviours are implemented rather how best they can be implemented to create a learner centred environment.

Gilly Salmon contends that the difficulties that may be experienced while teaching online result from the fact that online teachers have been unable to learn the skills they need vicariously. The authors of this journal agree with this point. It’s interesting to note that in the webinar *The case for virtual training* Martyn Lewis states that of his vast number of training specialists less than one third have made the transition to online training. The authors suggest that the lack of face to face contact with students in the online environment make it more difficult to teach online which may explain Lewis’s statistic. For me this article emphasises the arguments made by Clarke and Kwinn that it is not about

being seduced by the technology but rather the need to take a pedagogical approach to learning online. The authors may wish to distance themselves from creating best practise guidelines but from the nature of their discussion they have provided some practical examples for me to illustrate how to create the behaviours they have identified.